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The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the Northern Cheyenne Tribe (Tribe), and the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) are preparing a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) to evaluate the environmental effects of the proposed Tongue River Basin Project in southeastern Montana. The DEIS, which is being prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), is targeted for publication the first week of June, 1995. After publication, the DEIS will be available for review at libraries in the project area and at the following locations:

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
1520 East Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 202301
Helena, MT 59620-2301

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- Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, 1520 East Sixth Avenue, Helena, MT 59620-2301

- Northern Cheyenne Tribal Headquarters, Little Coyote Drive, Lame Deer, MT 59043

- United States Bureau of Reclamation, Montana Area Office, GSA Tower, 2900 Fourth Avenue North, Billings, MT 59101

Copies of the DEIS also may be obtained by returning the attached post card or writing to:

Edward M. Pettit, Environmental Coordinator
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
1520 East Sixth Avenue
Helena, MT 59620-2301

Public hearings to receive comments on the DEIS will be held at the following times and locations:

- Monday, July 17, 1995, 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the Busby School Auditorium, Busby, MT

- Monday, July 17, 1995, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., at the Dull Knife Community College Auditorium, Lame Deer, MT

- Tuesday, July 18, 1995, 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the Muddy Community Center, Muddy District, Northern Cheyenne Reservation

- Tuesday, July 18, 1995, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., at the St. Labre Mission Auditorium, Ashland, MT

- Wednesday, July 19, 1995, 12:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the Catholic Church, Birney Village, MT

- Wednesday, July 19, 1995, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., at the Holiday Inn Conference Room, Sheridan, WY

- Thursday, July 20, 1995, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., at the Miles City Community College, Miles City, MT

- Friday, July 21, 1995, 5:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., at the Fireside Inn Conference Room, Billings, MT

Project representatives will be available at each meeting to discuss the project and to receive public comments. Public comments can be submitted (orally and/or in writing) at the hearings, or can be submitted in writing to DNRC at the address above. Written comments submitted to DNRC must be postmarked by August 4, 1995.

After incorporating public and agency comments, a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) will be prepared and circulated. Following circulation of the FEIS, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be prepared stating the project sponsors' (DNRC, the Tribe, and USBR) final course of action.

BACKGROUND

The Tongue River Basin Project includes the repair and enlargement of the Tongue River Dam and the partial fulfillment of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reserved Water Rights Settlement Act of 1992 (Settlement Act). The project is being proposed to alleviate dam safety concerns and protect downstream lives and property, to protect all existing water use contracts held in the Tongue River Reservoir, and to provide up to an additional 20,000 acre-feet of water to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. An additional requirement of the project would involve the conservation, development, and enhancement of fish and wildlife resources and habitat in the Tongue River Basin. All project goals are components of the Settlement Act, which ratified the Water Rights Compact entered into on June 11, 1991, by the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and the State of Montana.

ALTERNATIVES

Three alternatives, including No Action, are considered in the DEIS. The two action alternatives are: (1) Labyrinth Weir Spillway Design, and (2) Roller Compacted Concrete (RCC) Spillway Design. Both action alternatives would rehabilitate or replace the inadequate Tongue River Dam spillway and raise its crest elevation four feet. The resultant increase in Tongue River Reservoir capacity would provide additional water to the Tribe and thus partially fulfill the provisions of the Settlement Act. A fundamental component of both action alternatives provides for the enhancement of fish and wildlife habitat in the Tongue River Basin.

SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

The principle environmental consequences that would result from the two action plans include:

- Hydrology. Increased reservoir capacity and contents following construction; short-term reductions in downstream flows during construction; increased upstream ice formation due to increased reservoir contents; short-term reductions in downstream water quality during construction; increased peak outflow from the spillway following construction (Alternative 1 only).

- Aquatics/Fisheries. Short-term drawdown and reduced reservoir capacity during construction; short-term reductions in downstream releases during construction; increased reservoir capacity and contents following construction; more stable downstream releases following construction.

- Vegetation. Pontential loss of up to 705 acres of vegetation due to increased reservoir capacity and contents following construction; short-term disturbances and reduced productivity to vegetation due to staging area activities, county road realignment, and aggregate mining activities.

- Biodiversity. Potential short-term reductions in biodiversity during construction; increased biodiversity following completion of fish and wildlife habitat enhancement component of project.

- Economic Environment. Increased employment due to project construction; cost to public sector for project construction and operation.

- Transportation. Short-term impacts to local roads from project construction; potential short-term impacts to streets in Sheridan, WY during construction (only if the Sheridan rail load-out facility is used to transport construction-related materials).

- Recreation. Short-term reductions in Tongue River State Park access during construction; short-term reductions in project area recreational experience during construction; short-term increases in exposure to navigational hazards in the reservoir

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TONGUE RIVER BASIN PROJECT
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Please fill out, tear off, and return the postage-paid self-addressed postcard. If we do not receive this card from you postmarked by May 19, 1995, we will assume that you do not wish to receive a copy of the DEIS.

Please check all items that apply:

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due to construction-related drawdowns; short-term limitations in access to boating facilities due to construction-related drawdowns.

- Appearance. Permanent alterations in dam and spillway appearance following construction (Alternative 1 would differ in appearance from the existing spillway due to its labyrinth (zigzag) crest, and Alternative 2 would have a different dam embankment profile as compared to the existing embankment due to the RCC secondary and emergency spillways).

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As the date nears for printing the DEIS, the project sponsors would like to inventory those individuals/organizations wishing to receive a copy of the DEIS, those who would like only the Executive Summary of the document, and those who would prefer to review the DEIS at one of the public locations where copies of the document will be deposited. Please indicate your preference on the attached card and mail the card back to us postmarked no later than May 19, 1995.

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